

NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM DRAFT FROM A PRIMARY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The recently released New Zealand Curriculum Draft for Consultation (Ministry of Education 2006a) sets out the Government's expectations of what school students should be able to achieve by the time they leave school.

The writers explore the vision and intentions of the New Zealand Curriculum Draft, to prepare students for the future, within the wider context of New Zealand's transformation to a 'knowledge' society and global competitiveness. In order to understand the challenges to a national provision of curriculum that the changing environment brings, the writers reflect also on the international and national contexts within which this New Zealand Curriculum Draft has been developed and the forces which have shaped it.

The writers' purpose to draw teachers into the discussion is achieved by posing a number of questions. The implications of the need for additional support and resourcing, to ensure schools can meet the aims of the curriculum draft and government expectations, are also canvassed.

INTRODUCTION TO A CONVERSATION

When launching the New Zealand Curriculum Draft (curriculum draft) the Education Minister said the current curriculum had served New Zealand well but was unwieldy and unfocused.

What we need is a clearer statement of the skills, knowledge and values that all students need in the 21st century. Our education system must ensure that all students meet very high standards, can achieve to their potential and are set up for life-long learning (Maharey, 2006a).

The curriculum draft offers a vision that extends beyond school to the consideration of a future New Zealand society. Educators are invited to examine this vision critically as a totality and comment on the component parts. The writers question whether the educational direction for students that is based on this vision is one with which New Zealanders agree.

Some commentators (for example, Eisner 2003; Toffler 1970, 1980) argue that the future in 20 years from now is unknowable and students cannot be prepared for it as though the future is a set piece.

Eisner (2003) writes that at first glance the idea of designing a curriculum that prepares students for the future seems unassailable, but he questions "Who among us can tell what the future will look like?" (p.6). He argues that some of the most significant weaknesses of education policy stem from the belief that the aims and content of education can be justified on the basis of preparation.

He asks:

If an unknowable future is not a sound basis on which to plan curriculum and instruction, then what is? (p.8).

He then argues that from his perspective "we can best prepare students for the future by enabling them to deal effectively with the present" (p.6). This means that students today must have broad opportunities and experiences so that they know there are many answers to a question, they can problem solve, work in a team, and they know how to learn. How should and how does the draft curriculum take account of present "best practice" ideals in preparing students for their unknown futures?

Durie (2006), from a Secondary Futures perspective, also talks about building the capacities of students so they might realise their potential and live comfortably in a future world. He believes that successful students in 2026 will have the capacity to learn, to participate in a future society, to be part of the New Zealand tradition, and to value self and others (pp6-7).

In his keynote address, Durie (2006) discussed the notion of a "customised pathway that reflects a shift from education as a compulsory requirement to one that builds on individual interest and enthusiasm, discerning parents, the exercise of choice and the facilitation of family and personal aspirations" (p.8). From this scenario, the implications for schools was the need for the student and the teacher to work together to develop a personalised programme of learning. This will ensure that students will have access to a range of learning programmes that will occur on a number of sites and that they will move easily between options to maximise learning. Schools will help students to integrate and process multiple information streams. Schooling will be expected to be responsive to communities and contribute to a community-based approach to education.

If Durie is correct, then a balance must be struck between prescription and freedom to ensure safeguards and guarantees for all students while allowing schools to determine their own curriculum according to the needs of students. This raises questions such as "Does the curriculum draft allow this balance; is there a tension between communities and the centre?"

What happens in a New Zealand education policy context is not isolated from international reforms. Macro environment changes impact on the positioning of any curriculum and should be considered along with significant research and policy work undertaken in New Zealand to identify the critical issues. These influences are discussed in the next sections.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES ON NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM REVISION

New Zealand's involvement with the international community has been heightened in recent years and this is particularly so in education. New Zealand participates in educational studies run by the [OECD](#) ([PISA 2000, 2003, 2006](#)) and [IEA](#) ([TIMSS 1995, 1999, 2003; PIRLS 2001, 2006](#)). New Zealand policy direction is consistent with that of England and the United States of America such as: the development of closer links between education, health and social policy (for example, UK 2005 'Every Child Matters' policy); the focus on student outcomes and the concept of success for all students which schools need to deliver through constructs of effective teaching and evidence based practice ([OECD 2006; Alton-Lee 2003](#)).

Internationally there is a growing concern around societal issues such as civil responsibility, ethics, values and international relationships ([AEU 2006](#)). These have universal applicability to modern international societies. As New Zealanders, we have strongly focused on the bicultural nature of our society; however, New Zealand is becoming more multicultural. How we respond to this requires a fresh consideration by educators of the balances within core curriculum and how our New Zealand identity is incorporated and protected.

Developments in technology have enabled rapid information sharing and increased the speed with which new ideas can be imported and adopted. The use of technology has impacted on the economic opportunities in New Zealand and influences the skills needed for a future workforce. Access to technology in educational settings impacts on opportunities for learning, changes the potential for how learning is organised and challenges the continued appropriateness of the infrastructure that supported educational opportunity through the twentieth century. As technological change continues to affect our lives, how will expectations of schools change and how appropriately is this reflected in the curriculum draft? Can teachers envisage and comprehend the impact of this change?

The way in which these issues are framed and shaped within the curriculum draft are pivotal to New Zealand retaining an authentic curriculum which, while learning from overseas, retains New Zealand's unique identity.

THE RECENT DEVELOPMENT PATH TOWARDS THE CURRICULUM DRAFT

Comprehensive reviews of curriculum in New Zealand took place in the 1940s, 1970s and 1980s. In addition, individual syllabuses were also reviewed, for educational and professional purposes, from time to time ([O'Donnell, 2001](#)). Changes in New Zealand education tended to be incremental, building on what already existed.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, a strong political agenda was evident in the administrative, structural and curriculum reforms ([Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988](#)). A shift in focus was made to meet the perceived needs of a highly competitive, modern international economy. This shift included: a move to self management and accountability of schools, a competitive

environment between schools, and an increased requirement for schools to report on student achievement to central bureaucracy ([Middleton, Codd, & Jones, 1990](#)).

A plethora of legislative requirements (for example, [Education Act 1989](#) and consequent amendments [Education Standards Act 2001](#); [State Sector Act 1998](#); including the [National Administrative Guidelines](#) amended in 1990, substantially revised 1993, amended 1996 and 1999), [Charter Planning and Reporting 2003](#) ([Ministry of Education, 2003](#)) and a barrage of initiatives were launched (discussed further in this paper). The effect of top down imposed policies and the limited opportunities for consultation and teacher involvement were de-professionalising.

From 2000, a stocktake of the curriculum was undertaken by educators and representatives from teacher organisations. A range of recommendations were made for the Minister of Education's consideration ([Ministry of Education, 2002](#)). The [New Zealand Curriculum Project](#) was then set up to update the [New Zealand Curriculum Framework](#) ([Ministry of Education, 1993](#)). Its purpose was to clarify and refine outcomes, focus on effective teaching, strengthen school ownership of curriculum, support communication and strengthen partnerships with parents and communities.

The process of development of the curriculum draft signalled a change to a more consultative style of development through a process of co-construction with teachers.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The curriculum draft sits within a wider framework of interrelated national policy which interprets the Government's broader economic and social intentions. Three major policies are commented on below.

The [Schooling Strategy](#) ([Ministry of Education, 2005](#)) provides an overarching framework within which schools are expected to attune their policy and practices including the implementation of the curriculum. This medium term strategy sets out three priorities which together contribute towards all students achieving their potential. The priorities are effective teaching, evidence based practice, and family/whānau community support.

The [e-Learning action plan](#) ([Ministry of Education, 2006b](#)) has a predominant focus on building critical infrastructure across all schools which allows data exchange and inter-school organisation as well as national collection of data. It also provides access to an effective 'knowledge building' software environment for teachers and



students. The aim is for schools to share exchanges of data and information, so that students and teachers can communicate, exchange ideas and work collaboratively to build their conceptual frameworks of understanding. The ability to provide students and teachers with a wide library of customised resources opens up the possibility for teachers to create rich educational resources and is claimed to support the objectives of higher order thinking, gaining understanding, knowledge construction, and high level questioning.

The Special Education internal plan (Ministry of Education, 2006c) with its intermediate outcomes of "presence, participation and learning" is intended to guide the work of the Group Special Education services over the next five years. The plan focuses on supporting teachers, early childhood services, schools and families working together to increase students' active engagement in learning through programmes that have been adapted to meet their needs. Differentiated teaching and learning across the curriculum must be now taken into account when considering the implications of curriculum implementation through the curriculum draft.

How well prepared teachers are to make these shifts in thinking, beliefs and practices is open to debate. How well resourced schools are to deliver on these ideals must become a focus of attention. Such matters now need to be examined in the context of the consultation on the curriculum draft.

Does the curriculum draft fix the problems of the past and lead to a more promising education for the future? Will teachers be able to make a cohesive pathway through these documents sufficient to meet their collective imperatives?

AN INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE CURRICULUM DRAFT

Positive statements made by the Minister of Education (Maharey, 2006b) at the release of the curriculum draft claimed that

The directions for learning proposed by this draft offer teachers more opportunities to apply their professional knowledge. The proposed curriculum will allow them greater flexibility to develop new and innovative teaching approaches, and to engage all students in rich and authentic learning experiences.

Initial reaction at the launch of the draft was positive. NZEI Te Riu Roa National President (Cooper, 2006) agreed the curriculum draft was much more user friendly for teachers:

as the current curriculum had become too complex and unwieldy with the addition of more and more components over the years. One document covers what is currently included in seven separate curriculum statements.

She saw as the chief advantage that the curriculum draft provided:

principals, teachers and school boards more freedom to determine the most effective way to teach the curriculum.

The writers' analyses consider that the curriculum draft proposes changes which will affect teaching and learning programmes in that it:

- condenses the current seven essential learning area curriculum statements into one document which offers the potential for greater flexibility;
- revises the aims and achievement objectives of each essential learning area to make them clearer and fewer in number;
- proposes five key competencies instead of the current eight sets of essential skills;
- emphasises the key competencies which include "thinking, managing self, relating to others, participating and contributing and using language symbols and texts";
- gives an increased emphasis to ICT;
- provides for second language learning, which has become the eighth learning area from year seven onwards;
- emphasises statistics in the mathematics curriculum;
- provides more coherent statements on values and assessment;
- acknowledges that some schools will organise their programmes in ways that integrate understandings, key competencies and values across a number of learning areas.

It is our view that the curriculum draft does not provide a recipe for teaching but a blueprint from which to work which is both liberating and challenging for teachers in developing authentic contexts and meeting learning needs. The writers, however, express caution. While the curriculum draft provides these opportunities there are also challenges and risks to the concept of national curriculum provision as currently known; and the direction and prioritisation communities may give to various curriculum opportunities afforded. The option to reduce curriculum breadth and provide opportunities for specialisation could impact on school choice and access to a network of 'good' local schools. Greater freedom of choice will open up pathways which have not been considered by most New Zealand schools but which are available overseas, such as the sponsorship of academies as a way to develop talent (Marley 2006, p.7).

Is this where we see our schools going?

In the following section we provide a more in-depth analysis on selected sections of the curriculum draft with a comparative look at what teachers are currently implementing through the curriculum framework. Readers are invited to respond.

DECIPHERING THE 'MESSAGES' OF THE CURRICULUM DRAFT AVISION

The Vision which was often implicit in the curriculum framework is made explicit in the curriculum draft. In the curriculum draft, the Vision now describes the role of education as developing, sustaining, transforming and empowering. It recognises that the function of education carries individual and societal benefits. The Vision provides a picture of the attributes, values and competencies that young people will gain during the educative process. It identifies the qualities of the sort of citizens that it sees as valued, in and for, New Zealand's future.

Close scrutiny of the Vision should lead to questions as to whether or not this Vision is a shared one. For example, while there would be no argument that students should be 'Confident', the expansion of the concept in the curriculum draft includes being 'entrepreneurial' and 'enterprising'.

In a private conversation, Snook (2006) took the view that

The presence of 'entrepreneurial' as part of the Vision is worrying since this 'value' (unlike others such as enterprising and resilient) has its logical home in the rhetoric of business and does not fit anywhere else. It is not the job

of the school to adopt a sectional value such as this. The role of business should be examined along with the role of organised labour, government intervention etc. (26 August, 2006).

The shift of education towards a world of work as expressed in the curriculum framework is now expressed in the curriculum draft as an entrepreneurial and enterprise culture. This suggests a further cementing of a core reason for education being to meet the needs of the economy.

Examples of "significant themes for engaging students" as stated in 'Designing a School Curriculum' (Ministry of Education 2006a, p.26) were regarded as limiting by the NZEI Principals' Council in an initial discussion on the curriculum draft (8 August, 2006) While the themes of sustainability, enterprise and globalisation are well-developed, the same cannot be said about the weighting given to the development of other concepts such as 'equity', 'social justice' and 'environment'. This leads to an imbalance in the direction for teachers when planning teaching and learning programmes.

Primary schooling has always provided a broad and balanced curriculum to ensure that student learning options are left wide and are not closed off at an early stage. The perceived emphasis on a particular and narrow vision for the future was viewed also with dismay by principals (NZEI Te Riu Roa Principals' Council, 2006). The combination of the narrowness of the Vision and the impact of individual schools being left to interpret the vision and maintain a broad and balanced education raises questions about how this concept and practice will be protected or whether individual schools will prioritise and specialise.

PRINCIPLES

A set of broad principles are included on which the proposed New Zealand Curriculum is to be based. Principles are seen as beliefs that guide practice, and schools are advised that they should use the principles as they design and implement their own curriculum. As statements of belief they are neither 'right' nor 'wrong' they are simply useful or non-useful, and appropriate or inappropriate.

The Principles of the curriculum framework claimed to *give direction to the curriculum* in New Zealand schools. The curriculum draft Principles focus, however, on entitlements of *experience* for all students in various aspects of the curriculum coverage, *empowerment* to learn and achieve, and *recognition* and *affirmation* of individuals' identities, cultures, languages and talents.

Whereas a basic premise in the curriculum framework was that the individual student is the centre of all teaching and learning and all students should be provided with a curriculum of the highest quality, this is not as explicit in the curriculum draft. Yet the term "personalised learning" is heralded by the Minister (Maharey, 2006c). The increasing intensity of work for teachers will need to be considered against the issue of class size if teachers are to be able to achieve these expectations.

VALUES

The curriculum draft and the curriculum framework both focus on values. Each focuses on a quite different aspect of values and both claim community endorsement.

The curriculum framework described values as "internalised sets of beliefs or principles of behaviour held by individuals or groups" and the values reflected in the curriculum framework are those that "are supported by most people in most communities". Within the curriculum framework, it is also asserted that the values are "Commonly held values of individual and collective responsibility that underpin New Zealand's democratic society" (p.21). The evidence for this statement came from the wide public response to the curriculum process in the 1980s led by the Committee to Review the Curriculum (1987).

The curriculum draft speaks of values as "deeply held beliefs about what is important or desirable" and asserts that the values outlined "are those that the New Zealand community supports because they enable us to live together and thrive in a diverse, democratic society in the twenty first century" (p.10). Evidence to support this claim is not presented.

As 'beliefs', again they are neither right nor wrong – they can be either agreed with, or not.

The difference between the groupings and selection of values in each of the

documents could be characterised by the curriculum framework's focus on behaviours and the curriculum draft's focus being mainly on ideas, but with only some behavioural implications.

If the curriculum draft is given force by regulation, its values will be the ones that must find expression in each school's programme. The choice of values will not be up to each community to decide but rather the specific ways in which they are given expression will be guided by dialogue between the school and its community. This feature has a potential for conflict and possible watering down of the values that are proposed. Obversely, this may prove to be a redeeming factor.

KEY COMPETENCIES

The Curriculum Stocktake report (Ministry of Education, 2002) recommended that, to be consistent with Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996), the essential skills should be modified from the current organisation of fifty seven essential skills in eight groupings to five groups of essential skills and attitudes. In the curriculum draft, these essential skills and attitudes become 'key competencies' (pp.21-22).

As defined in the curriculum draft, the key competencies align with the OECD research-based model. Competencies are conceptualised as the capabilities needed to undertake a task or meet a demand. Competencies can be seen to include skills, knowledge, attitudes and values needed to meet the demands of a task. Competencies are performance-based and manifested in the actions of an individual in a particular context (Brewerton, 2004).

The competencies are more than discrete skills and attitudes; they integrate all aspects of learning. It should be noted that the OECD framework will also be the basis for key international assessments, so this consistency will be helpful for higher level evaluation of the effectiveness of the New Zealand system. The OECD framework has been developed as the result of considerable international debate. International comparisons of benchmarked achievement can have both positive and negative uses. New Zealand teachers will need to be vigilant as to the way in which they are used.

Jane Gilbert (2005) writes on the changes to views of knowledge that have significant implications for teaching, learning and assessment. She notes that rather than being valued for its own sake, knowledge is valued for its *performativity*. Students of all ages need to take this active view about knowledge and to do this they need to be clear thinkers and communicators. Similarly, the OECD view of competence is that it results in a person taking action to

complete a task or achieve a goal.

The writers contend that the five key competencies set down in the curriculum draft – managing self, relating to others, participating and contributing, thinking, using language symbols and texts – are all part and parcel of a primary teacher's current tool box. But if teachers are to maximise the development of competencies in an increasingly wide range of contexts and complexity, there needs to be provision for professional learning opportunities.

Teachers consulted by the writers (NZEI Primary Classroom Advisory Group, 2006) for initial reactions to the changes have signalled their concerns that there is still work to be done in relation to 'teasing out' how the key competencies provide a framework for designing learning environments and experiences within each learning area. Teachers are required to marry these with meeting the achievement objectives from each learning area in an integrated manner. The 'Planning with a Focus on Outcomes' section of the curriculum draft notes that the Vision, Values and Principles are embedded in the key competencies, the learning areas and the daily life of the school.

Teachers, will of course, develop innovative ways of dealing with this. An example of one school's experience attempting to use the Key Competencies, as reported by the Acting Principal Gay Gilbert (2005), follows:

teachers at Hillcrest Normal have experimented with the inclusion of the key competencies into planned rich task units of work using authentic contexts – shared team plans, all different, to "best fit" the unit of work, more emphasis placed on different key competencies depending on the structure and focus of the unit. Most have put them in the centre of the unit plan and worked them into teaching sequences. This process has required teachers to discuss in depth about how they will interpret and implement the key competencies into class programmes.

Teachers have been enthusiastic and keen to trial these ideas. We have taken the view that they are innate qualities that underpin how we see students and learning. Our major dilemma has been the assessment of these; so we have developed learning stories using photographs and written by teams to produce a folder of exemplars of what a key competency looks like "in action". We have also reflected and evaluated the units using professional learning circles to refine and critically analyse where to next, how effective have we been etc.

We strongly believe they should not be checklists to be ticked off as the essential skills have become.

EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT

The sections on effective pedagogy and on assessment in the curriculum draft contain a welcome collation of the currently accepted best practice related to teaching, learning and assessment in New Zealand (Alton-Lee, 2003). In the curriculum framework, this section was to a large extent omitted and instead was addressed separately and more or less explicitly in each of the accompanying individual curriculum statements.

Teachers will still need to access the specific language, pedagogy and assessment required by each of these different disciplines. Assessment for learning across the curriculum with differentiated teaching and personalised practices is a huge increase in expectations.

Having the overview of the main ideas about good teaching, learning and assessment practices that will underpin and support the implementation of the proposed New Zealand Curriculum is a positive feature of the curriculum draft. The strength of the 'Planning for Purposeful Assessment' section is that it gives a greater sense of coherence to the curriculum as a device for determining, planning, and achieving purposeful and integrated learning students.

lack of emphasis on importance of teachers building positive relationships with their students were one of the few disappointments raised by the principals consulted (NZEI Te Riu Roa Principals' Council, 2006).

MISSING, MASKED OR UNDEVELOPED ELEMENTS THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

The area of greatest difference between the curriculum framework and the curriculum draft documents relates to the statements about New Zealand's identity. New Zealand's modern genesis is a country stems from an agreed relationship as



spelled out in the Treaty of Waitangi. The Treaty has been broadly acknowledged in New Zealand and is widely recognised as having an important place in the development of pathways forward for our country.

The question that must be asked is why the Treaty has been excluded from the curriculum draft and the consequent implications for te reo Māori in schools.

The status of te reo Māori is not addressed sufficiently in the curriculum draft. It is interesting to note that the Ministry of Education's own draft country report for the OECD (Ministry of Education, 2006d) makes the point that:

It is widely understood that the Treaty acknowledges Māori as the indigenous people and commits the Crown to protecting Māori language, values and cultural practices.

The impending development of the Te Marautanga o Aotearoa Draft to be released in 2007 also poses questions around whether what is acceptable, as delivery to Māori should vary depending on the language of instruction.

MĀORI EDUCATION

The New Zealand curriculum draft asserts that "students who identify as Māori have the opportunity to experience a curriculum that reflects and values te ao Māori" (Ministry of Education 2006a, p.9). The writers believe no attention is paid in the curriculum draft to meeting this need.

Currently, 3.8 percent of all Māori students were attending kura kaupapa Māori. A further 16.2 percent of Māori students are taught in Māori-medium programmes which involve students being taught either all or some curriculum learning areas in the Māori language either in immersion or bilingual programmes (Ministry of Education, 2006e). The fact that the Māori curriculum accessed by Māori medium students is contextually located in the Māori world, whilst the majority of Māori students in the mainstream will be relying mainly on Pakeha interpretations to develop and determine appropriate learning contexts indicates a continued inequity that is problematic. A further growing concern is the dislocation of the student who moves between Māori medium curriculum and mainstream curriculum.

A question remains as to the capability of teachers to meet the aspirations of Māori, despite their willingness. The curriculum draft leaves this open to each school to interpret.

The late development of a Ministry of Education (2006f) Māori language resource for the use of year 7 and 8 students highlights the continuing gap in a fragmented commitment to resourcing for Māori in the mainstream. Teachers who have been teaching te reo from foundation years onward are bemused by the placement of this formal resource in the middle years of the curriculum plan. It suggests the resource was developed as part of the Ministry of Education's resourcing responses for the Learning Languages section. Yet the irony is that this section refers to languages other than English and Te Reo Māori.

The curriculum draft seems to fall short on its commitment to provision for Māori students. The Treaty of Waitangi partnership has implications for a sharing of resources and also requires the exercise and recognition of responsibility and authority in a manner that leads to mutual respect. This requires a commitment from Government as well as from schools.

BICULTURALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

The population of New Zealand has changed markedly in the past two decades. It is a much more multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society than it has been in the past. New Zealanders, both the more established and the more recent arrivals, share the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities. There can be no case for 'real New Zealanders' and 'other New Zealanders'. All must have their cultures and ethnic and language backgrounds recognised and attended to in the New Zealand Curriculum – not as special provision but as mainstream activity.

Students learn best when their learning is culturally located. New Zealand, today, has had a poor track record of catering for the needs of some ethnic groups. Relationships, or in the curriculum draft terms "connections", underpin the Treaty, biculturalism and multiculturalism. These relationships need to be made explicit.

Demonstrating biculturalism and multiculturalism involve attributes, including attitudes, skills and behaviours that should be accorded value in the New Zealand context. Such attributes could be explicitly planned for as an outcome of a New

Zealand Curriculum and reinforce and enhance all students' capacity to engage with other parts of the curriculum.

LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

In July 2003, the Minister of Education announced that all year 7 and 8 students were to be given the opportunity to learn another language from the following year. The Minister confirmed the statement in a speech to the Wellington Diplomatic Club on 1 April 2004. At the time, the announcement did little more than confirm the status quo as the expectation of second language learning was already in the curriculum framework.

The Minister and Ministry's recent public statements say it will not be compulsory for students to take up the option. As the intention is to make the proposed New Zealand Curriculum compulsory it is curious that Second Language Learning has been included as an eighth Learning Area if it is the only one not compulsory. This is the first test for the school and its community to make choices on school priorities and decisions about what programmes the school will resource.

There is no argument with the premise that second language learning increases cultural awareness, intellectual and social growth, as well as providing reflective opportunities for English language learning. There is, however, a major question about what can be achieved in primary schools by overloading the curriculum with extra requirements and placing expectations on schools to make decisions about what will, or will not, be taught. Intensive and sustained professional learning, resourcing and targeted recruitment will be needed to make this more than a golden dream.

THE LACK OF ATTENTION TO AN INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

An inclusive curriculum takes as its premise that all individuals and groups to whom it applies will be made visible and, where appropriate, special relevance will be identified.

An area of difference between the curriculum draft and the curriculum framework is the lack of acknowledgement in the curriculum draft of gender, socio-economic, and specifically ethnic, social and religious backgrounds and differences. Yet these areas are often the basis for discrimination. Not to identify them is not to address the problem. The writers contend that the curriculum draft places the responsibility on the school with no reciprocal responsibility evident by the government.

A SEAMLESS CURRICULUM

The curriculum draft actively supports

moves towards creating a seamless learning experience and recognises the benefits of increasing the links between Te Whāriki and the New Zealand Curriculum. In practice, this move must be made without compromising the integrity of either statement.

The attempt to align the key competencies in the curriculum draft (p.33) with the dispositions of Te Whāriki, the proposed Tertiary Education key competencies and the OECD framework provides a picture of a seamless progression through the years of formal education and for life beyond. This attempt at cross-sector alignment is welcome but the diagrammatic representation of a disposition in Te Whāriki such as "well being and belonging" leading to a tertiary competency "acting autonomously" is an artificial construct which is untested.

Fractures in curriculum philosophy, curriculum organisation and pedagogical provision at schooling transitions raise questions as to how we can ensure the needs of students and how the range or stage of development of each student can be best accommodated in a seamless manner. To be more effective, teachers will need not only to share data but also to have conversations with those who teach older and younger students.

CONCLUSION ... OR AN INVITATION

TO JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Teachers individually and collectively have a significant role to play in the maintenance and enhancement of quality public education in New Zealand. That role is becoming more complex as a result of growing demands. New knowledge and understandings about the learning process and external factors that impact on the process have incrementally and successfully required teachers to respond reflectively and change the way they work.

The curriculum draft provides a further example of that challenge. Unpacking the curriculum draft and interpreting it in meaningful ways is a beginning. Translating this into operational plans for each school is a significant next step, and it will need to be supported by quality professional learning. That will require time, time to develop quality relationships including the time to digest the implications for change and to plan and develop appropriate programmes to support the needs of students. Engaging with the curriculum in depth will require ongoing professional learning opportunities for teachers to ensure they have the level of content knowledge to enable them to plan and teach effectively and will need to continue to be a priority. Slim volumes from the centre reflect the need for much more

work at the local level. Completing that work and sustaining quality across a national education system is the imperative.

The Minister of Education was quite right when he said:

Now it's up to you. To students, teachers, principals and boards. To parents, to employers, businesses and communities. This is your time to help shape the future path of learning for this country (Maharey, 2006a).

An unstated ending to this quote could quite comfortably be "and by doing so help to shape the sort of society and country we seek for our future."

The curriculum draft does not specify what should be included or left out in a school's teaching and learning programme. It enables considerably different provision which may limit educational choices that parents can make for their children. It allows for local differences in curriculum emphases to occur and thereby will enable the schools to shift further along the lines of what is perceived as 'good' for their students' learning and move further away from national consistency. Although there may be consistency at the primary level, it is likely schools are to become more specialised or 'academy' based at the secondary level. By reducing consistency in implementation, there is an increased likelihood of further accountability to confirm student achievement.

The curriculum draft provides a new form of competitive environment and new form of choice. What curriculum focus a parent wants for their child will strongly influence the school of choice.

It is the writers' view that at the heart of any discussion about the primary curriculum is the question of what kind of person do we want our students to be? Eisner (1997) offers us a vision with which we agree:

Among the various aims we consider important in education two are especially so. We would like our children to be well informed - that is, to understand ideas that are important, useful, beautiful, and powerful. And we also want them to have the appetite and ability to think analytically and critically, to be able to speculate and imagine, to see connections among ideas, and to be able to use what they know to enhance their own lives and to contribute to their culture (p.349).

This article is a starting point only. It examines what is included, what is missing, what is masked, and what is undeveloped within the curriculum draft. It is the start of a conversation that we invite others to engage in.

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